

## Make it routine to prevent work-related stress

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Caroline is an experienced policy professional working on HSE's work-related stress and mental health team which develops advice, guidance and tools to help employers understand their legal duties and the effect of work-related stress on workers.

Lots of us have experienced stressful periods at work at some point, but when it's happening frequently or over a long period of time, it can really start to impact our physical and mental health.

If this strikes a chord with you, know you are not alone. The pandemic turned our worlds upside down and changed many of our roles both at home and work. Out of control workloads, difficulty coping with or adapting to the demands of the job, unsupportive managers and strained relationships are common reasons for work-related stress.

The government's Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that in the UK in 2020 to 2021, 822,000 workers reported experiencing work-related stress, depression or anxiety. The mental health charity, Mind, found that 2 in 5 employees reported that their mental health had worsened during the pandemic.

Even before the pandemic, it was estimated that mental health issues cost UK employers up to £45 billion a year. This is something that we need to tackle.

### What employers and workers should be doing

The law requires all employers to assess the potential risk from work-related stress and to take steps to tackle it where it's identified – and we know that many employers are not aware of their legal duties.

But it's not all down to employers. As the [Acas framework for positive mental health](#) highlights, we all have a responsibility to look after our own mental wellbeing, in and out of work.

Managers and workers should take steps to spot and tackle the causes of workplace stress by:

- looking out for colleagues who might be struggling and encouraging them to seek help
- taking part in discussions about mental health
- promoting open and honest conversations

## How HSE's Working Minds campaign can help

[HSE's Working Minds campaign](#) has specific advice and tools to help workers and managers to promote and encourage good mental health, and support each other.

It's based on 5 simple steps of risk assessment:

- reach out and have the conversations
- recognise the signs of stress
- respond to any risks identified
- reflect on what's happened
- make it routine

Key to the campaign is removing the stigma – getting people to talk about issues and normalising these conversations. This is so that asking how people are feeling, and listening to the answer, become a routine part of everyday working life. This can help you recognise and respond to issues early before they escalate.

## How to start talking about stress

If you're struggling to reach out and get conversations started, [HSE's Talking Toolkit](#) can help kickstart simple, practical conversations with workers, identify any issues and tackle them.

The conversations are based around 6 factors:

- demands
- control
- support
- relationships
- role
- change

Each of these can lead to stress if not managed properly. The toolkit has easy to use templates, each designed to get line managers and workers talking about issues which might be causing work-related stress.

April is Stress Awareness Month and there has never been a more important time to drive cultural change across Britain's workplaces to manage work-related stress.

The theme this year is community. Building a supportive workplace, where workers look out for each other and relationships are positive, can help reduce, even prevent, stress developing.

Why not use this as an opportunity to reach out and talk to your colleagues and workers? Check in on how they're doing and consider the support available and relationship dynamics where you work. Use [HSE's risk assessment template](#).

If you're passionate about making positive changes to workplace culture and want to support us to spread the message about how to prevent work-related stress and promote good mental health, we'd love you to [become a Working Minds campaign champion](#).